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# Marriage Migration and State Interests: Reflections from the Experiences of Marriage Migrants from the People's Republic of China in Taiwan

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**Abstract:** This paper, by building on the empirical case of marriage migration across the Taiwan Strait, problematises the consequences, on migrants' lives, of state-to-state relations, especially when sending and receiving states hold antagonistic nationalistic interests. This paper aims to contribute to the empirical literature on marriage migration, particularly in the East Asian context, by adding the dimension of state to state relations in shaping contemporary movements for family formation. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the broader debate on transnational migration studies by arguing that the power of the nation-state over contemporary migration flows is not fixed and immutable, but it is rather a dynamic force that changes depending on broader factors related not only to global restructuring but also to the relations between sending and receiving state. Ultimately, migrants may have a degree of agency in responding to sending and receiving country's nationalistic agendas.

**Keywords:** marriage migration, migrants and state, cross-Strait marriage, Taiwan, transnational migration

## 1 Introduction

In recent decades, we have witnessed an intensification of human connections, mobility and exchanges due to the expansion of new technologies, the reduction in transportation costs and in time length of movements, and the introduction of new cheaper opportunities to network across borders. In the light of this increased global mobility, several scholars put under discussion the authority of the nation-state, arguing that migrants unbound their actions and identities from a specific nation-state, territory and society and take advantage of their

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affiliation to multiple social, economic and political spheres to increase their opportunities in life.<sup>1</sup> Although more recent scholarly debates challenge this view by arguing that state's authority is still a significant realm in the lives of contemporary migrants, the main debate revolves around the consequences of a nation-state's position in the global order.<sup>2</sup>

Hardly are the consequences of sending and receiving state relations taken into account when exploring transnational migration flows.

With regard to the specificity of cross-border movements for marriage, nation-states play an important role in shaping marriage migrants' lives and trajectories. The scholarship particularly stresses an increasing interference of the receiving state in marriage matters, through immigration policies and laws. Empirical accounts explore how the jurisdiction of receiving states over intimate unions has been employed as a tool to preserve national security<sup>3</sup> and ethnic composition<sup>4</sup> or, on the contrary, to offer alternative solutions to internal social and economic problems.<sup>5</sup> This literature overlooks the role played by the sending state on the lived experiences of marriage migrants.

This paper, building on the case of marriage migration across the Taiwan Strait, aims to advance the debate on transnational migration by shedding light on two components related to state actors, namely the influence of the single state as well as state-to-state relations on migrant lives. Cross-Strait marriage migration offers important insights in this regard, as factors peculiar of the cross-Strait context, such as the conflictual relations between Beijing and Taipei, intersect with broader factors shared by other movements for marriage in the region and globally.

This paper is based on ethnographic work carried out through various long-term visits to Taiwan, between May 2008 and December 2015. I carried out in-depth interviews with marriage migrants and government officials, as well as participant observation in the context of various civil society organisations advocating for and providing support to marriage migrants. While most of my fieldwork was done in Taiwan, in 2011, I also spent a short amount of time in Guangdong Province (Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Dongguan), in the southeastern part of the People's Republic of China (PRC), where I carried out in-depth interviews with cross-Strait couples residing in China, with the purpose of

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<sup>1</sup> Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1995; Grillo et al. 2000; Guarnizo/Smith 2008; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Landolt et al. 1999; Lipszyc 2004; Robinson 1998.

<sup>3</sup> So 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Lee 2005, 2008; Lim 2010; Tan 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Piper 2003; Suzuki 2003.

understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the sending society. In Taiwan, I also attended official meetings and events organised by women's organisations, the National Immigration Agency, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), as well as exchanges between civil society organisations and PRC delegations on informal exchange visits in the island. Finally, this research also benefits from the close relationship I established with some migrant spouses as a consequence of a six-month English class for marriage migrants, which I delivered in one of the civil society organisations in 2011. An important feature of this research is that it builds on long-term exchanges with marriage migrants as well as with civil society organisations. Through these constant exchanges I could gain a long-term perspective on the phenomenon of cross-Strait marriage migration as it evolved throughout the years.

In this article, I will first explore the phenomenon of marriage migration in Taiwan, considering the social and economic changes that occurred in the island in the last decades. In light of this broader picture, I will then address the specificity of the case of marriage migration from the PRC to Taiwan and I will discuss the dynamic relationship between these migrants and the sending and receiving states at various stages of cross-Strait relations.

## 2 Marriage migration: global trends, local issues

Increased exchanges of people, capitals and goods across borders have shaped contemporary marriage practices, favouring the growth of cross-border marriages globally.<sup>6</sup> The different position of sending and receiving states in the global order are identified as important factors shaping contemporary marriage migration trajectories. Thus, in the East Asian region, richer countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and, to a lesser extent, Japan, have been the main receivers, and developing countries such as China, the Philippines and Vietnam, have been the main suppliers of migrants that aspired to marry someone from abroad.<sup>7</sup>

In this region, demographic and cultural factors, as well as a country's position in the regional order, contributed to shape migrants' experiences and trajectories. On the one hand, in a context where the rule of hypergamy was still rooted, men from wealthier countries who found themselves in a disadvantaged position in the domestic marriage market, sought to improve their chances of

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<sup>6</sup> Hsia 2004; Lu/Yang 2010; Williams 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Hsia 2008: 190; Jones/Shen 2008: 13; Jones 2012: 1–2; Lu/Yang 2010: 15.

marrying by accessing markets where they would be more competitive thanks to their membership to economically wealthier countries. On the other hand, women from poorer countries strategised marriage as a means of escaping poverty and moving up through the spatial hierarchies to richer areas.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to the specificity of Taiwan, the long-term exchanges with neighbouring populations, due to the import of cheap foreign labour and the policies favouring investments abroad for Taiwanese businessmen, also favoured a gradual increase of cross-border marriages between Taiwanese citizens and women from Southeast Asian counties.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, since the late 1980s, as a consequence of a liberalisation of the exchanges between China and Taiwan, the PRC became an alternative source of potential spouses for Taiwanese men. Marriage migration across the Taiwan Strait generated from similar motivations as it was the case of other unions with Southeast Asian women, yet it acquired different meanings due to the long-term conflictual relations between the two states governing each side of the Strait.

### 3 Cross-Strait relations and marriage migration

The term Cross-Strait relations refers to the political, economic, social and cultural relations occurring between the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC) since the Nationalist Army, led by Chiang Kai-shek, lost the Civil War against the Communists, led by Mao Tse-tung, and took refuge in Taiwan in 1949. For almost four decades, the two sides, technically still at war and waiting for the right moment to liberate the other side from the enemy government, did not engage in any social and economic exchanges. Consequently, the two societies developed apart until the ban on movements across this border was lifted in 1987.<sup>10</sup> Throughout these years, the Communist Party in the PRC insisted that it was the only legitimate government of China, which also includes the province of Taiwan. Under this theory, Beijing proposed to extend the principle of *one country, two systems* to Taiwan in 1984 (the same principle that was adopted with Hong Kong after 1997) and reaffirmed the “one China policy” in the following years.<sup>11</sup> On the other side, for several decades, the government of the ROC held that it was the only legitimate government of China.

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<sup>8</sup> Tseng 2010: 33–34.

<sup>9</sup> Tsai/Hsiao 2006; Wang 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Hao 2010; Wachman 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Hung 2011: 418.

This disagreement on who should represent China had never been solved. It had only been deferred by means of the 1992 Consensus, holding that there is one China, yet each side had a different interpretation on the meaning of one China,<sup>12</sup> which created the preconditions to re-establish economic, social, cultural exchanges across the Strait. However the validity of this agreement had been questioned in several occasions, threatening the economic, social and political stability of the cross-Strait context.

The push for change mainly came from the Taiwan side. Political, economic and social changes occurred during the process of democratisation, had also produced a shift of the priorities in the island. The first President to question the idea of one China was Lee Teng-hui who introduced the concept of *special state-to-state* relations, which caused negative reactions in Beijing. Cross-strait relations became even more hostile when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a pro-independence party, won the elections in 2000 and contested the 1992 Consensus. Within this rhetoric, President Chen Shui-bian proposed the *one country on each side* principle. Beijing also objected this idea.

While the two sides were negotiating their different interests and perspectives vis-a-vis each other, the ban on movements across the Strait was lifted and the first exchanges between the two populations could officially occur. Migration for marriage across this border is a direct consequence of a gradual increase of social and economic exchanges between the PRC and Taiwan. In 1987, and in the years immediately following, cross-Strait marriage migration was mainly related to the reunion of families formed before 31 December 1949, which had been kept apart by the civil war.<sup>13</sup> This was the first wave of marriage migration from the PRC to Taiwan and it involved a few dozen cases. Yet the phenomenon gradually acquired new forms, also due to the fact that Chinese and Taiwanese enjoyed different degrees of mobility across the border. If almost any Taiwanese citizen, other than a person in active military police or civil service, could travel to the PRC once a year for the purpose of visiting relatives, and, later on, for study, business, and tourism, PRC citizens did not enjoy such degree of freedom: they could be issued with entry permits to Taiwan only for family reunions, visiting dying relatives, attending family members' funerals.<sup>14</sup> In this context, marriage could be a strategy to allow PRC citizens to cross an otherwise forbidden border. Throughout the 1990s, these unions involved mainly retired soldiers, the first Taiwanese citizens to be granted the right to visit the PRC, and PRC women from rural areas. War

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<sup>12</sup> Hu/Lin 2002: 142–143.

<sup>13</sup> Tu/Li 1999: 502.

<sup>14</sup> Wu 1994: 164–165.

veterans were born in the PRC and arrived in Taiwan with the Nationalist Army in 1949. Forbidden from marrying during their service, once they retired they found themselves in a disadvantaged position in the local marriage market as they were often too old and too poor to compete with other men. Yet, when they visited their home villages in the PRC, they met an abundance of women wishing to marry in order to increase their economic opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Later on, the phenomenon extended to other social groups in Taiwan, such as fishermen, farmers, and aboriginal communities.

Things changed after 2008, when the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) came back to power in Taiwan. During two terms in office, President Ma Ying-jeou pushed for a more accommodating approach with the PRC, re-establishing a new balance in cross-Straits relations which favoured Beijing's perspective. Placing Taiwan under the Greater China framework, rather than as an independent state, and naming it "special relations between region-to-region on equal footing",<sup>16</sup> President Ma Ying-jeou stipulated several cross-Straits economic agreements and this not only boosted economic exchanges across the border, but also favoured a further liberalisation of the movements of PRC citizens to Taiwan as tourists, students, and, later on, as investors. As a consequence of this new course in cross-Straits relations, exchanges between the two populations not only continued to increase steadily<sup>17</sup> but "they also became less unequal as PRC citizens gained more opportunities to visit Taiwan."<sup>18</sup> Consequently, cross-Straits unions started to involve a more diversified range of people, such as younger generations, business people, tourists and students."<sup>19</sup>

With a steady growth of about 10,000 new marriages per year, at the end of December 2015, there were 330,069 PRC citizens in Taiwan with the status of spouse of a Taiwanese citizen.<sup>20</sup> Sending and receiving governments had contrasting attitudes towards these migrants. The ongoing relations between the PRC and Taiwan did not only contribute to shape movements' trajectories, but also the pattern of opportunities and constraints faced by these migrants and their families. In the next two sections I will explore the contrasting attitude embraced by Beijing and Taipei towards this form of migration. If the section on

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<sup>15</sup> Fan/Huang 1998: 231; Fan/Li 2002: 623–625.

<sup>16</sup> Muyard 2010: 6.

<sup>17</sup> MoI 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Governmental statistics show that short term visits from the PRC to Taiwan increased exponentially from an average of 200,000 per year before 2008, to exceed 2,000,000 in 2014 (MAC 2014).

<sup>19</sup> King 2011: 184; Friedman 2010: 76; Lu 2008: 93–100; Momesso 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Momesso/Sun 2010: 192.

<sup>20</sup> MoI 2016. This statistical data do not include Hong Kong and Macao citizens.

Taiwan builds on the extensive literature available on this topic, the section on the PRC draws from the data collected during my fieldwork activities between 2014 and 2015.

## 4 Cross-Strait marriage migrants as a threat to national security

Because of association with the hegemonic power that has oppressed Taiwanese identity for decades, PRC marriage migrants had been viewed by the Taiwanese state and society as a possible threat to national security and sovereignty.<sup>21</sup> A differentiated legal treatment<sup>22</sup> created the conditions for the stipulation of ad-hoc immigration policies targeting this group of migrants and with the aim to reduce their possible impact on national security and sovereignty.<sup>23</sup>

This was especially notable when the DPP was in power (2000–2008). Quotas on arrival and border controls were introduced to reduce the inflow of PRC marriage migrants; quotas on the various steps in the documentation process and complex visa and residency requirements were engineered to slow down the process of citizenship acquisition; limitations on the right to work were imposed to diminish their contributions and impact on the economic sphere of the receiving society; limitations on the right to hold public office and to set up political parties, even after the acquisition of Taiwanese citizenship, had persisted to distance this group from participating in the political life of the country.<sup>24</sup> The media discourse further legitimised this unfair treatment by portraying PRC marriage migrants in negative terms and presenting them as a potential threat to national security and as coming from a poor and backward country.<sup>25</sup>

As the literature broadly explores, a sense of social injustice emerged amongst PRC marriage migrants as a consequence of this unfair treatment

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<sup>21</sup> Shih 1998: 293; Chen 2010; Friedman 2010; King 2011; Hao 2010; Shih 1998; Yang/Lee 2009.

<sup>22</sup> In Taiwan, due to the constitutional ambiguity that PRC citizens are ROC nationals but not citizens (Cheng and Fell 2014: 87), PRC marriage migrants are regulated by a different document, if compared to other international marriage migrants, the Act Governing Relations between Peoples of the Taiwan and the Mainland.

<sup>23</sup> Friedman 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Cheng/Fell 2014; Friedman 2010; Liao 2007; Yang/Lee 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Shih 1998.

since the first half of the 1990s.<sup>26</sup> Thus, through the help of their Taiwanese spouses, who also experienced discrimination, PRC marriage migrants organised collective actions aimed at challenging the attitude of the Taiwanese authorities and society towards them. In their public actions, PRC spouses did not only asked for a better treatment as members of Taiwanese society, but they also boasted their attachment to and love for Taiwan, meeting, in this way, the expectations of the receiving society.<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, due to the political concerns attached to this social group in Taiwan, showing any strong attachment to the PRC could be perceived negatively. Yet, as I argue in another paper, the official narrative did not always match the unofficial one, which would emerge only in safe and hidden spaces away from the eyes of Taiwanese people, and reflecting connections to and feelings for their homeland.<sup>28</sup>

As the literature documents, a shift in the Taiwanese political arena and the improvement in cross-Strait relations after 2008, contributed to a betterment of PRC marriage migrants' living condition.<sup>29</sup> An easing of the restrictions on PRC citizens' movements to Taiwan, and the opening up of direct flights between the PRC and Taiwan gradually became important assets in cross-Strait marriage migrants' lives. Furthermore, their legal status improved considerably: the process of obtaining Taiwanese citizenship was reduced from 8 to 6 years, limitations on the right to work were lifted, and school records from a number of Chinese universities were recognised in Taiwan.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, as Friedman incisively suggests, these improvements remained limited to the economic sphere, as politically, PRC spouses were still regarded as a national threat. For instance, restrictions on the right to work in public office and to set political parties (both only possible ten years after the obtainment of Taiwanese citizenship) remained unchanged. Also, despite the promise of President Ma Ying-jeou, during his electoral campaign, the time length to obtain Taiwanese citizenship was never reduced to four years, the equivalent of other international marriage migrants. As a matter of fact, according to a Taiwanese government official, this request faced widespread opposition within the

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**26** Chao 2006; Cheng/Momesso forthcoming; King 2011; Momesso/Cheng forthcoming; Tseng et al. 2013.

**27** King 2011.

**28** Momesso 2015a.

**29** Friedman 2010; Tseng et al. 2013; Momesso 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Momesso/Cheng forthcoming; Cheng/Momesso forthcoming.

**30** Friedman 2010; Tseng et al. 2013.



Parliament: granting such right would have implied an increase of potential voters amongst PRC marriage migrants and could affect the outcome of national elections and, ultimately, the future of Taiwan as a nation.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the belief that these migrants could be a threat to national security and sovereignty had never completely been erased in Taiwan. And this has deeply shaped the lives of this social category as a politicised group.<sup>32</sup> With such premises, any sphere of the lives of these migrants, intersected with cross-strait politics and particularly with Taiwan's reactions to cross-strait politics.

## 5 Cross-Strait marriages as a channel for national unity

Cross-strait marriage migration had not been one of the main concerns of PRC authorities for years. Beijing looked favourably on social and economic exchanges across the Strait, as they were expected to reduce suspicion between the two societies and hasten reunification. Yet, most of the attention was placed on Taiwanese investments in China as they brought many economic benefits to a country that was still struggling with poverty and development.<sup>33</sup> Cross-strait families did not seem to be an important target of PRC government. In the words of one of my informants:

In the early years, the mainland government thought that cross-strait marriages were not something important. Three hundred thousands marriages would be a rather small number in the mainland. Yet more recently PRC authorities have changed their perspective. They have visited us and they realized that we are doing a good job. [...] They have discovered that there are not only good marriages across the Strait, but that there are also cases with problems. They realised that when a woman arrives in Taiwan she is completely lonely. Social organisations have the potential to be very helpful.<sup>34</sup>

This informant was the President of one of the civil society organisations, located in Taipei, which worked closely with the government to offer legal support and social aid to PRC marriage migrants. Amongst its several tasks, it also established regular contacts with PRC local authorities, since the first half

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<sup>31</sup> Conversation occurred on 7 May 2015, London.

<sup>32</sup> Friedman 2010; Yang/Lee 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Wu 1994: 166.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with the President of the Chinese Association of Relief and Ensuing Service, 11 July 2011, Taipei.

of the 2000s, with the purpose of improving the information flow on a phenomenon that was still relatively unknown to Chinese local and central authorities.

Other more grass-roots organisations also established a long-term relationship with various PRC local authorities. Initially, these exchanges were kept low profile and they occurred mainly behind the scenes, in the PRC, or in the closed-door environment of civil society organisations, in Taiwan. When I was in Taiwan between 2010 and 2011, I could observe three meetings between civil society organisations and PRC delegations. Marriage migrants were invited to participate in these events, with the aim of welcoming their local authorities as well as informing them about their experiences in the island. Spouses often brought their cases, asked for elucidations, and begged PRC authorities to help them solve their legal matters in Taiwan.

As the PRC and Taiwan are regulated by different laws and hold different procedures to deal with marriage agreements, cross-Strait marriages would also entail the difficulties of meeting the legal requirements of each side. Taiwanese organisations often blamed the highly bureaucratic PRC system, and above all, the fact that there was a lack of detailed information for prospective cross-Strait couples available in the PRC. Taiwanese organisations urged PRC authorities to ease the system, also in light of Taiwan's procedural standards on marriage unions. Yet, it took a few years for these interactions to bear fruit and to see a real engagement of the PRC government towards these requests.

A change in Beijing's approach towards cross-Strait marriage migration could be traced back to the early 2010s. Wang notes that newspaper reports about cross-Strait marriage migration in the PRC became more positive in tone, reflecting a repositioning of the PRC vis-a-vis Taiwan.<sup>35</sup> This also occurred at the government level as cross-Strait families were integrated into a broader official discourse on peaceful re-unification. Previously closed-door and low profile exchanges were replaced by official events designed to celebrate *the cross-Strait family*. In June 2012, Beijing launched its first Cross-Strait Marriage Family Forum (海峽兩岸婚姻家庭論壇) in Xiamen (Fujian province), a symbolic city considering the historical and geographical connections with Taiwan and the fact that there the first cross-Strait marriage was registered in 1989.<sup>36</sup> On this occasion, which is repeated regularly each year, government officials, academics, specialists, social practitioners, civil society organisations from both sides, as well as members of cross-Strait families were invited to discuss the theme of marriage migration and family formation across the Taiwan Strait. The accounts published in PRC official websites concerning this event, reflect the

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<sup>35</sup> Wang 2015: 20.

<sup>36</sup> Cross-Strait Marriage Family Association, 2015a.

nationalistic rhetoric promoted by Beijing. Not only they are full of positive expressions referring to cross-Straits families, such as “beautiful cross-Straits marriages”, “harmonious and happy cross-Straits family”, but they also stress the significance of these families for cross-Straits relations: “through these families the future of cross-Straits relations will improve even faster, there will be more employment opportunities, and life will become even happier”.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond this official event, other initiatives in support of cross-Straits couples, were organised. Following the example of Taiwan, at the end of 2012, a nationwide body specialising in cross-Straits families was launched, under the name of the Cross-Straits Marriage Family Association (海峽兩岸婚姻家庭協會) and Cross-Straits Marriage Family Service Centre, (海峽兩岸婚姻家庭服務中心). Under the authority of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, these bodies were set up in several provinces and cities in the PRC with the purpose of facilitating an exchange of information on cross-Straits families, offering legal advice and aid, providing information, improving the quality of cross-Straits marriages and family life, developing a forum on policies related to cross-Straits families.<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, cross-Straits families’ children were targeted as an important group worthy of being cultivated with the purpose of nurturing their Chinese identity and strengthening their affiliation to the PRC. Thus each year various exchange activities, such as summer/winter camps, in PRC were organised for the children of these families. As one of my informants, who accompanied her son to one of the summer camps organised in Beijing, stressed:

The future of cross-Straits relations lies with these children and students. Thus only through these activities and events could these youth really understand China. They can see the tall buildings and large mansions of the mainland, its prosperous scene, which is not the mainland that is presented by Taiwanese media, backward and non democratic. [...] I believe that the objective of Beijing was fully achieved! It was a success, a success! My son never used expressions such as “you have to love mainland” “mainland is my country,” but while climbing the Great Wall, he had a change of attitude. There is a saying in Chinese: you are not a proper person until you reach the Great Wall. While my son was climbing the Wall he kept on saying “I love Beijing, I love the Great Wall”.<sup>39</sup>

This new approach should be interpreted in light of Beijing’s efforts to strengthen its official contacts with strategic social groups in Taiwan and to better understand the thoughts and sentiments of the people in Taiwan in a phase of prosperous cross-Straits relations, during the mandate of President Ma

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<sup>37</sup> Cross-Straits Marriage Family Association, 2015b.

<sup>38</sup> From the Cross-Straits Marriage Family Association website: <http://c-smf.mca.gov.cn/article/jggj/jtxh/> (last accessed 10 January 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Migrant spouse interviewed on December 4, 2014, Kaohsiung.

Ying-jeou (2008–2016).<sup>40</sup> This is not unique of the cross-Strait case. The Chinese government has shown an increasing interest towards its migrant communities abroad in the last decades.<sup>41</sup> According to Louie these actions reflect the PRC's efforts to promote cultural and racial unity amongst all the Chinese people of the world at a stage in which China was trying to re-establish its position globally and regionally as an economic power.<sup>42</sup> Yet, within the cross-Strait realm these efforts are deeply permeated with cross-Strait politics, and particularly the logic of national reunification promoted by Beijing.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, Beijing's new approach towards this category of migrants occurred in concomitance of some visible changes amongst the community of PRC marriage migrants in Taiwan. In the early years, civil society organisations related to cross-Strait families, focused on the main objectives to improve spouses' rights, welfare and social support, as well as to offer them a platform for exchange and mutual support. When I was in southern Taiwan in 2014, I interviewed newly formed civil society groups, such as the Kaohsiung New Resident Association for Economic Development (高雄新住民經濟發展協會) and the Taichung City Care Promotion Association for Mainland Spouses (台中市陸配關懷促進會). Moving beyond the traditional debate on basic rights, which characterised the cross-Strait migrant movement of the early years, these newly established networks framed an alternative rhetoric based on the added value that PRC marriage migrants could offer to Taiwan as well as to the PRC. As one of my informants argued, PRC spouses are in a privileged position now, being among the few individuals in Taiwan who hold an in-depth knowledge of Taiwan *and* China.<sup>44</sup> In other words, in a phase in which investments and movements from the PRC to Taiwan were further liberalised, PRC spouses framed themselves as a channel between the two societies. Cross-Strait marriage migrants went as far as to access the realm of politics by establishing political parties in Taiwan. The China Production Party (中國生產黨) was established in 2009, whereas the Chinese New Resident Party (中華新住民黨) and the New Resident Republican Party (新住民共和黨) were established in 2013. In a changed political atmosphere across the Strait as well as in Taiwan, PRC marriage migrants also redefined their public image in Taiwan by revealing a side of their identity, not only their attachment to their homeland but also to its nationalistic

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<sup>40</sup> Romberg 2014: 7.

<sup>41</sup> Leung 2015; Louie 2004; Zhuang 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Louie 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Sam 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Migrant spouse interviewed on 25 October 2014, Taichung.

project of peaceful reunification, which was previously confined to hidden spaces and intimate occasions. If these political actions should be understood in light of a number of concurrent factors, such as a long-term discrimination and marginalisation in Taiwan, a neglect of the desires and needs of this group by the main parties, a politicisation of their daily lives and intentions, and a process of gradual acquisition, by marriage migrants, of new means to change this unfair condition, they should also be regarded as a response to Beijing's shift of interest towards this category of migrants.<sup>45</sup>

Because of a more recent shift of the political scene in Taiwan, with the victory of the DPP in the national elections in January 2016, cross-Strait relations are entering a new delicate phase. As a consequence, new conditions may present to cross-Strait marriage migrants. Although the PRC most likely will preserve its hegemonic position in the global order in the near future, this social group may have to re-negotiate their position in Taiwan in the context of the fluctuation of the dynamics of cross-Strait relations.

## 6 Conclusion

By building on the empirical case of migration for marriage across the Taiwan Strait and looking at marriage migrants' negotiation with sending and receiving state actors, this paper argues that the power of nation-state is still a significant factor in shaping contemporary migration flows. Yet, nation-state authority over migrants, is not fixed, it should instead be interpreted as a dynamic force that changes depending on broader factors related to global restructuring as well as context specific factors shaped by relations between sending and receiving state. As I showed throughout this paper, the emergence and evolution of marriage migration across the Taiwan Strait demonstrates how life across this border is deeply entangled with nationalistic logics, which do not only pertain to the receiving state, but also to the sending one. While Taipei looked at these marriages as potential threats to national security, Beijing saw in them possible channels to favour peaceful reunification. Ultimately, cross-Strait marriage migrants defined their collective identity and actions in response to these opposing conditions. Thus, perceived as a national threat in Taiwan, they organised collectively to challenge the receiving government's unfair attitude. Once included in Beijing's strategies to achieve national unification, they developed a sense of pride and took advantage of these changed conditions to organise new forms of collective actions.

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<sup>45</sup> Momesso 2015c.

This case could be significant both for empirical as well as theoretical debates. Empirically, it adds to the literature on transnational marriage migration by shedding light on the constant negotiation between migrants and state actors. Rather than seeing the jurisdiction of states over intimate unions only in terms of interference and restrictions imposed on their lives, this paper sheds light on opportunities emerging from migrants' responses to changed national agendas. Theoretically, this paper not only confirms the role of nation-states in shaping migration patterns and outcomes, but it also sheds light on the significance of state-to-state relations in further problematising contemporary migration phenomena. The dynamic and evolving political context in which the phenomenon of cross-Strait marriage migration occurred, suggests that migration phenomena should be interpreted in light of the responses of migrants to a number of intersecting factors that do not only pertain to a reconfiguration of the global and regional order, but also to context specific features that could be related to state-to-state relations.

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